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How to Frame a Picture: A Digital Humanities Toolbox for Enhancing Visual Literacy Instruction

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StoryMap JS

StoryMap (https://storymap.knightlab.com/) is a free, easy-to-use image annotation tool that allows you to tell a location-based story. It's a great alternative to traditional research papers that allows librarians to embed visual literacy lessons within the scaffolded assignment. StoryMap was created by Northwestern University's Knight Lab, and is very easy to use while producing stunning results.

Below is an example I created for an in-class demonstration of StoryMap. I picked a neighborhood in Nashville and mapped the city's historic markers.

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Introduction

Students are being asked to create use images more and more frequently. I've seen students create maps, design websites, and present posters. Despite this, visual literacy isn't always a part of the bigger information literacy conversation. With the growing prominence of digital humanities in both libraries and higher education in general, there's a new opportunity to teach students these vital skills.
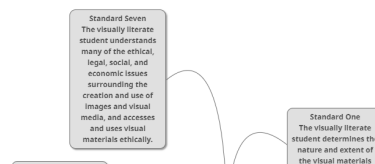
With so many images being created, shared, edited and otherwise utilized almost exclusively in a digital environment, digital humanities tools are a natural fit for practical visual literacy instruction.

This 'toolbox' showcases how four different digital humanities (DH) tools can be used to teach one or more of the ACRL standards.

the acrl
VISUAL LITERACY STANDARDS

The ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education are a series of 7 standards designed to help librarians teach college students how to navigate the use and evaluation of images. The standards are illustrated on the chart below, and more information can be found on ACRL's website here (http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy).

Standard Seven
The visually literate student understands many of the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding the creation and use of images and visual media, and uses visual materials ethically.

Standard One
The visually literate student determines the nature and extent of the visual materials

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Wikipedia

I love using Wikipedia as a tool, and students, who've been told for years to not use the free encyclopedia, usually find it very compelling to work with as well. As a librarian, I also love helping students create on Wikipedia because it allows for information to be more accessible to others. While edit-a-thons and other projects have become more commonplace in the library, Wikipedia also has interesting uses for visual literacy instruction.

The image below is a screenshot from one of Wikipedia's meetups: Images of Women in STEM edit-a-thon (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/Images_of_women_in_STEM_edit-a-thon_-_ArtScienceGallery), which sparked the idea for

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Juxtapose JS

Juxtapose JS (https://juxtapose.knightlab.com/) is another tool from Northwestern University's Knight Lab. It's free, easy to use (and to teach!), and creates very compelling image comparisons. Juxtapose images can be used in a variety of ways, including being embedded in websites and used in presentations.

Below is an example I created using 2 images from Google Maps to illustrate the catastrophic effect the May 2010 floods had on Nashville, Tennessee. Seeing the Opry Mills mall and Grand Ole Opry submerged in the waters from the swollen Cumberland River illustrates the extent of flood damage more effectively than words.

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Artstor

Artstor (https://library.artstor.org/#/home), a popular database of over 2 million images, is the only tool in this toolbox that requires a subscription to access its complete content. If your institution doesn't subscribe to Artstor, you can still use the database, but you'll be limited to their collection of publicly available images. While I normally try to promote open-source alternatives, I find Artstor to be a particularly useful tool for visual literacy instruction.

Below is an animated gif of helpful Artstor tools used in the suggested instruction activities, including image groups, the image record itself, and the use of the advanced search features.

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